

**Social valuation of Refuge services for survivors
of domestic violence**
May 2013

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

nef consulting (the consultancy arm of think tank new economics foundation) was appointed in April 2013 to prepare a social valuation for Refuge of services provided to survivors of domestic violence.

Refuge, the country's largest single provider of specialist domestic violence support, runs a network of services which support over 2,800 women and children on any given day.¹ Refuge supports a three-pronged approach to addressing domestic violence involving:

- **Provision:** Providing a national network of high quality specialist services supporting women and children who experience domestic violence to regain control of their lives and move forward in a positive way.
- **Protection:** Advocating for improvements to policy and practice aimed at dealing with domestic violence, and the implementation of legislation to meet the needs of abused women and children.
- **Prevention:** Helping to prevent domestic violence through campaigning, education, training and research, and working in partnership with other agencies to raise awareness of domestic violence, its causes and solutions.

The services Refuge provides include:

- Refuge housing
- Community outreach
- Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs)
- Culturally specific services
- Child support workers
- Helpline and information
- Campaigning, training and education

This study focuses on the first three services, described in Section 2.1.

The analysis was informed by engagement with women who accessed these services and supports, supported by outcomes data collected by Refuge through its case management information system. The research followed a Social Return on Investment (SROI) methodology – a framework that measures the social, environmental and economic value created for both service users and wider society as a result of access to Refuge's specialist services. SROI helps organisations to understand and manage their impact across all

stakeholders, rather than simply focusing on revenue or cost savings for one stakeholder.

1.2 Methodology

The valuation study followed the SROI methodology², as set out below.

- Engage stakeholders to identify outcomes
- Evidence outcomes through data collection/collation
- Model and calculate social return on investment
- Communicate findings

Engaging stakeholders

An initial meeting was held with Refuge staff in order to understand the breadth of services offered, the challenges clients face and the most appropriate focus for the valuation study. A short desk review of Refuge materials provided further understanding of the services they offer.

A workshop was conducted with clients of the support services to understand the changes that they experienced as a result of accessing support. This informed development of a theory of change, and the identification of primary outcomes for the study (Sections 2.2 and 2.3).

Data collection

Refuge uses a bespoke electronic case management information system, REMIT, designed specifically to inform and support the work of its practitioners, and to track service users' journeys from referral through exit.

REMIT records outcomes requested by women when they first access services and throughout their engagement, and tracks the achievement of those outcomes through Refuge's support. The system is capable of generating reports recording these achieved outcomes for each service, as well as changes in clients' feelings of fear and safety, confidence, and quality of life. Reports covering the annual period from 1 April 2012 through 31 March 2013, generated for each service, provide the evidence base for the social valuation.

REMIT groups service outcomes in four key areas: safety, health, economic, and social well-being. The outcomes included in this study reflect this grouping.

Model and calculations

A model was developed setting out each of the material outcomes and calculating the net impact of each, taking into account how much

would have been achieved in the absence of the service (deadweight), how much of the impact can be attributed to Refuge as opposed to other supports, and whether the results displaced outcomes elsewhere. A financial valuation was applied to each of the outcomes, and the overall benefits compared with the cost of delivering the support in the year in question.

The model includes three stakeholder groups: women, their children, and the State. Outcomes are further disaggregated by three services – refuge housing, outreach services, and independent domestic violence advocates (IDVAs) – described in section 2.1 below.

Communicate findings

This report sets out the findings of the study, the conclusions of the research, and recommendations for future assessment.

1.3 Report structure

This report is organised as follows:

- Section 2 provides a brief introduction to Refuge services, and describes the need for these supports as informed by our primary research. A theory of change describes the ways in which these services create change in the lives of those who are affected. We also provide a summary of the outcomes identified by clients which have informed our research.
- Section 3 sets out the impact of the support for three key stakeholder groups: clients, their children, and wider society (including fiscal saving for the State).
- The final section sets out the conclusions of the study, and our recommendations for future data collection and analysis to inform on-going evidence of the wider benefits of the support, both to the clients and wider society.
- Appendices A through C lay out financial proxies, impact considerations, and the SROI model.

2. Refuge services & outcomes

“When we saw the room [in the refuge] it helped a lot. It was a good thing – warm room and warm things.” – Focus Group Participant

“I have more rights than I thought I had. I feel cared for and important – someone is thinking about me.” – Focus Group Participant

“I felt insecure until I spoke to my worker. There are a lot of things about my language and culture and talking to her motivated my thinking that things were going to be positive.” – Focus Group Participant

2.1 Refuge services

The Refuge services on which this study focuses are briefly described below.

Refuge housing

Refuge runs 42 refuges in 16 different local authority areas providing temporary emergency accommodation for women and children fleeing domestic violence. In 2012/13, these facilities supported 722 women and 658 children.

Specialist Refuge staff provide a range of practical and emotional support to women and their children, including safety planning help with accessing benefits, addressing personal financial issues, and securing permanent housing in a safe area.

Outreach services

Trained Refuge staff also meet women in their homes, or arrange to meet in a discreet public place, to offer confidential practical and emotional support. This may include information on how best to escape a perpetrator, or the development and implementation of a safety plan. Refuge runs 17 outreach units which supported 260 women in 2012/13.

Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs)

Refuge's Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs) provide expert guidance to women who are at high risk of serious injury and harm, many of whom will access the civil and criminal court system. This may include accompanying women to court, requesting special measures (for example, the use of screens to conceal women giving evidence), and liaising with all involved statutory agencies. In 2012/13, IDVAs supported 2,419 women.

Culturally-specific services

Although they are not separately accounted in the valuation, a number of Refuge services are designed to meet the specific needs of women from different cultural backgrounds. For example, cultural beliefs surrounding marriage may make it more difficult for some women to leave a partner, while it can also be difficult to access mainstream services across a language barrier. Additionally, some women prefer to be with expert staff and women from the same ethnic background who understand their specific needs and experiences.

For these reasons, Refuge operates a number of culturally-specific services, including refuge housing for African, African Caribbean and South Asian women, and outreach services for Eastern European and Vietnamese women. While these services are not separately

“If it weren’t for
Refuge, more women
would be murdered in
their homes.” – Focus
Group Participant

accounted in the valuation, they are included in the overall service categories and we recognise their additional importance.

2.2 Theory of Change

Introduction

A theory of change describes the process through which change occurs, with those involved in benefitting from a service being actively involved in “telling the story” of how the service affected them. To develop this story, we held a workshop with Refuge service users to discuss their experiences.

The outcomes described below are grouped by Refuge’s impact domains, as recorded in REMIT, and reflect the outcomes that service users identified as most important to them. There is a high degree of overlap and interaction between outcomes, and it was made clear that the path from domestic violence to independence is a complex but achievable one.

What Changes?

Safety. The most immediate concern for most women who come to Refuge is their physical safety and the safety of their children. While fear of physical harm is often the most compelling reason for women to flee their homes, service users reported that many perpetrators also instil further fear in their victims by threatening that they and their children will face further harm, be deported, shunned by their community or that their children will be taken away. These are equally powerful modes of control and domination.

From the perspective of women and children, safety is a basic requirement of survival, but equally important is the perception of being safe. Feeling safe generates many benefits in other domains including better sleep and associated health improvements; reduced risk of mental health problems, substance misuse, and self-harm; improved optimism and autonomy; better ability to undertake daily tasks and fuller participation in society.

Refuge activities and services that contribute to safety and perceptions of safety include: development and implementation of individual support and safety plans, help finding new safe accommodation, access to benefits and support where appropriate to report domestic violence to the police and to seek protection.

“My child was so sick I thought he would be taken away. Refuge got access to doctors and now he is much better.” – Focus Group Participant

“I feel I have close friends for the first time.” – Focus Group Participant

Health. Domestic violence negatively impacts health in a number of ways beyond immediate physical harm. Anxiety and depression are common mental health conditions experienced by women and children who are subject to abuse. While protecting women from violence reduces physical harm and injury, women who escape the emotional abuse of domestic violence are also less vulnerable to associated mental health issues.

In addition, violence towards pregnant women (during which time abuse frequently begins or intensifies) commonly results in complications, potentially harming the child before it is even born.

Women are often disempowered to care for their children, through imprisonment in the home, financial abuse and through isolation from systems of care and support. Shame is another reason why some women may not seek medical help for themselves or their child. The State, in providing medical care to those who suffer poor mental health, and supporting those with poor physical health through benefits, has the potential to benefit from a reduction in incidents yielding cost savings.

Refuge activities and services that contribute to health include support with immediate urgent health needs, the opportunity for women to discuss the emotional effects of domestic violence on themselves and their children, and provision of information about community-based specialist services.

Social Well-being. For service users, isolation is a universal theme of domestic violence. Perpetrators deliberately isolate their victims to facilitate their actions and escape punishment. In addition, the shame that many victims feel means that their isolation is compounded. Women reported feeling isolated from their families and friends, who may not understand the gravity of their situation, and in some cases actively shunned victims.

Social isolation is distressing, and also has practical impacts. Isolated women and children are unable to access information, cannot build trust in other people or community services, have no ability to build a support network and generally experience barriers to securing successful employment and education.

In escaping a violent perpetrator, and overcoming the stigmatisation that many women and children feel as victims, space is created for friendships to grow or become re-established. Through Refuge services, many women forge a strong connection with other women who have been victims, where mutual understanding of a shared

“The best thing about my life now is that I am standing on my own two feet.”

– Focus Group Participant

experience is quickly apparent. For young people, school attendance and participation are likely to improve if abuse ends.

Refuge activities and services that contribute to social well-being include support in reconnecting with supportive friends and family, and provision of information about social activities for women and their children to access.

Economic. Financial abuse is a common feature of domestic violence. Limiting access to funds, monitoring expenditure as well as reducing women’s ability to make financial decisions provides the perpetrator with a high degree of control over all aspects of her life. Women in this situation often have no understanding of how to manage their finances, what sources of funds might be available to them or what it costs to maintain a certain standard of living. This makes them fearful of living independently and binds them to the perpetrator.

Helping women into financial independence allows them to better care for themselves and their families and can be a prerequisite step to give women the confidence to escape abuse. Often this may be achieved through advising women on the entitlements they have to benefits or support services. Ultimately, returning to work increases women’s self-esteem and social networks, which then have positive effects on other aspects of their lives.

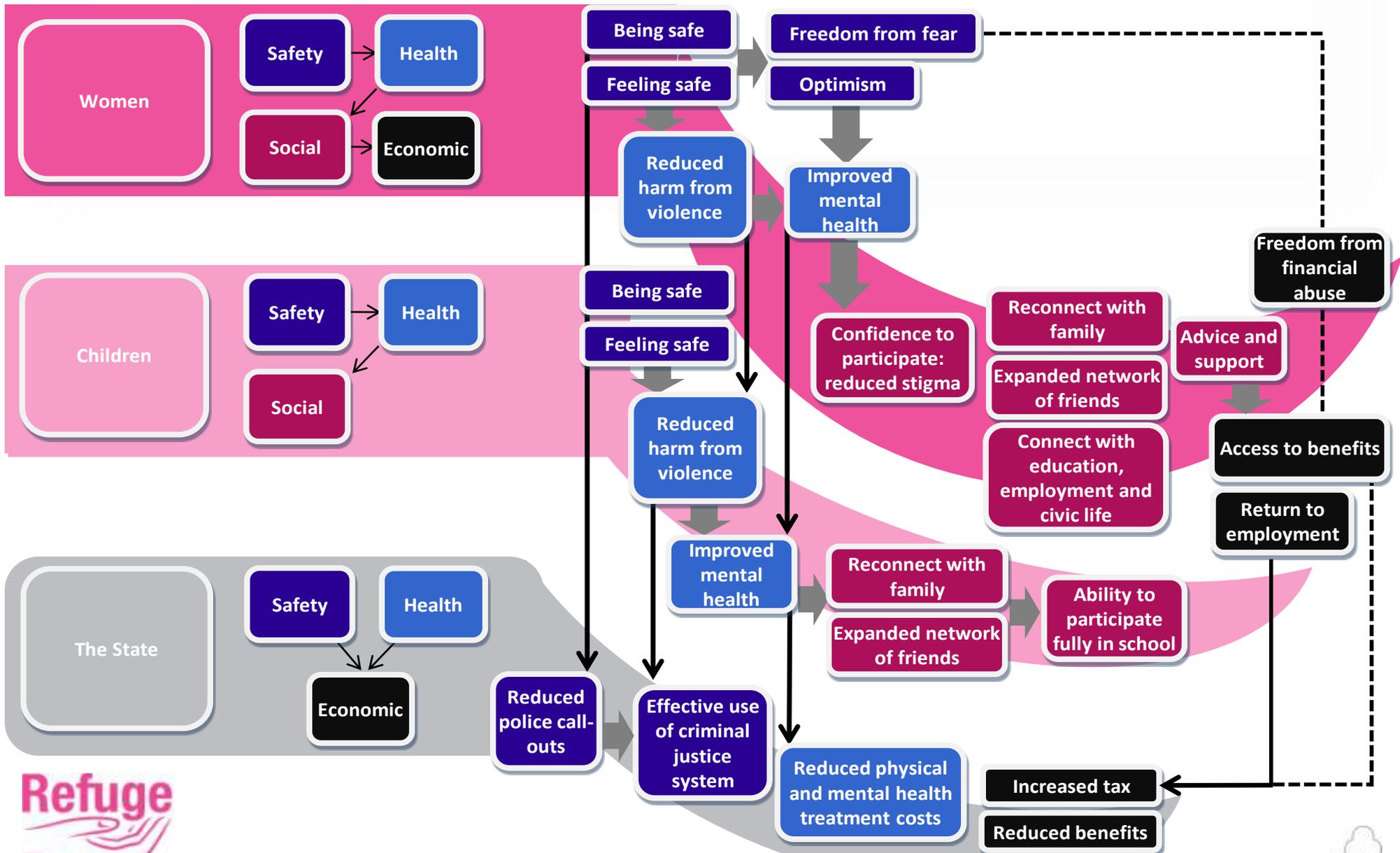
From the State’s perspective, financial independence can mean higher tax revenue from earnings as well as reduced benefits payments as women are able to financially support their families – though in the short term expenditure may rise as women take up entitlements.

Refuge activities and services that contribute to economic empowerment include support in reviewing survivors’ financial situation, financial planning and help in obtaining, clarifying and changing financial documentation, assistance in claiming benefits for women and their children, and support to obtain new employment.

Refuge: Theory of Change

Stakeholder

Outcomes



Being Safe	Client reports end to all types of abuse and controlling behaviours, applied to assessed level of physical abuse experienced at intake
Feeling Safe	Client reports end to harassment / stalking between intake and exit
Improved Physical Health	Support with any immediate urgent health needs
Improved Mental Health	Woman accesses specialist provider in relation to mental health
Reduced alcohol misuse	Woman accesses specialist provider in relation to alcohol use
Reconnection with family / Expanded network of friends	Help to think about friends or family whom I can safely talk to and reconnect with for support
Confidence to Participate / Reduced Stigma	Reported improvement in confidence in accessing support
Freedom from financial abuse	Support to review my financial situation following domestic violence
Access to benefits	Help in claiming benefits for myself and my children, including housing
Return to Employment	Number of women supported to obtain new paid employment

Outcomes for children

The majority of women involved in each of the three assessed services have children, who are also supported by Refuge. The physical, psychological and emotional effects of domestic violence on children can be severe and long lasting. Young children can also experience developmental problems which can affect academic and employment prospects later in life. However, our model only attempts to account for immediate safety, health and social well-being outcomes for children.

Table 2 – Outcomes for Children

Outcomes for Children	Indicators (REMIT)
Being safe	Develop and implement an individual support and safety plan

	for myself and my children
Feeling safe	Reduction in assessed risk to children from intake to exit
Improved physical health	Support to register for a health visitor (children under 5)
Improved mental health	An opportunity to discuss the emotional effects of domestic violence on me and my children
Reconnection with family	Information about play activities for my children

Outcomes for the State

In addition to the direct benefits for women and their children, their individual outcomes also have wider benefits to the State.

Outcomes for the State	Indicators (REMIT)
Reduced criminal justice system costs	Cessation of domestic violence against cost to state per incident (including police, prosecution, courts, probation, prison, and legal aid).
Reduced physical health costs	Cessation of domestic violence against cost to state (NHS) per incident
Reduced mental health costs	Cessation of domestic violence against cost to state (NHS) per incident
Increased tax base	Woman supported to obtain new employment
Benefits	Cost to state (DWP) of provision of benefits accessed through Refuge support

2.4 Valuing Outcomes

Financial Proxies

For each of the indicators above, the change reflected was translated into indicative financial value by assigning a monetary value reflecting

how much each stakeholder values each outcome. Although there is no conclusive way to 'price' positive changes in an individual's life, some standard techniques are used to arrive at an approximation. One technique is to estimate what people would be prepared to pay to achieve an outcome, or to avoid a negative outcome (for example, estimating a willingness to pay figure to avoid harassment or stalking). Another technique is to assign a market price, if one exists, or to use an appropriate financial approximation (for example, using the indicative price of a financial advisor to represent the value of financial supports offered through Refuge). A full list of financial proxies and values is provided in Appendix A.

Establishing Impact

After identifying outcomes, evidencing them with indicators, and attaching financial value to these changes, it remains to estimate the impact of the intervention – estimating how much of the outcome is due to the specific service provided. In SROI terms, this means taking into account what might have happened anyway without the service (deadweight), how much other organisations or services have contributed to the observed change (attribution), the extent to which one outcome may have been achieved at the expense of another outcome elsewhere (displacement), and how long the effect is expected to last (drop-off). A full list of the impact considerations used is provided in Appendix B.

3. Results

The SROI model is provided in Appendix C.

A conservative estimate of the value generated by one year of Refuge's work across the three services is £33,080,483. With an annual investment of £9,346,223, the overall social return on investment ratio is 3.54 to 1, or £3.54 for every £1 spent.

Table 4 – Social Return on Investment Ratios by service

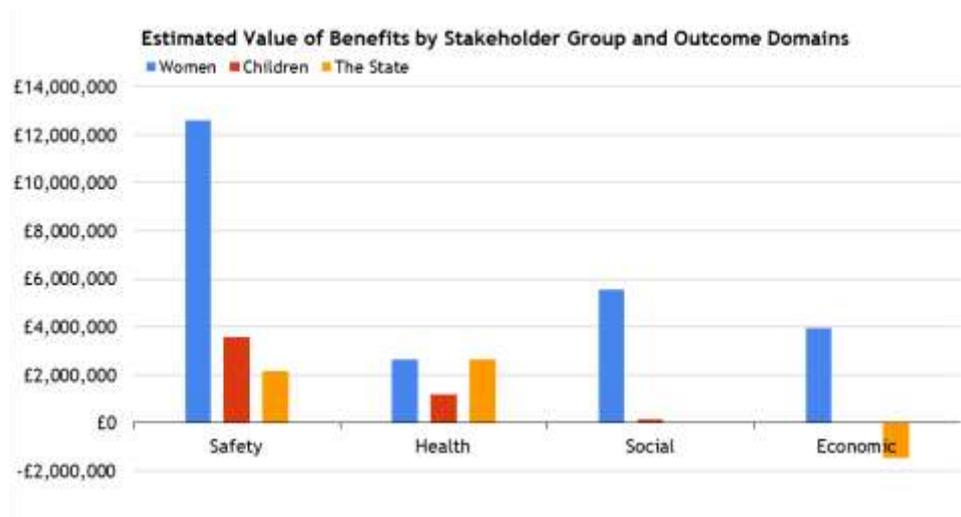
	Refuges	Outreach	IDVAs	Total
Value of Benefits	£14,219,517	£3,376,527	£15,484,438	£33,080,483
Cost of Inputs	£7,139,359	£639,604	£1,567,260	£9,346,223
SROI Ratio	1.99	5.28	9.88	3.54

(N.B. When the cost of inputs for refuges is adjusted to take into account women who came into our services who were already in receipt of housing benefit, the SROI ratio increased from 1.99 to 2.69, reflecting the fact that the entry of these women into our services came at no increased cost to the State.)

Social return on investment is one measure of an organisation's effectiveness, showing the relationship between costs and benefits. In pure economic terms, anything above 1:1 is considered economically efficient at creating outcomes. Refuge creates social value far above this threshold in all three assessed services.

It is important to note that the ratios are not intended to imply the relative value of one service over another. By their nature, each service works with clients in different situations, and their supports are not substitutable; for example women who access refuge housing would neither request nor achieve the same outcomes as women who access outreach services. These services operate different models tailored to support different needs.

Chart 1 – Benefits by Stakeholder Group and Outcome Domain



Assessing value by stakeholder groups:

- Women accrue nearly £25 million worth of value in total, and return 135% of Refuge’s total investment through safety outcomes alone.
- Children accrue almost £5 million in total value, predominantly within the safety and health outcome domains. Although they are likely to experience significant economic and social benefits later in life, these are not estimated here because the available data does not allow us to track longitudinally whether these outcomes are achieved.
- It is estimated that £3.4 million of value is generated to the State through Refuge’s interventions. This is mainly attributable to reduced incidence of domestic violence leading to modelled savings in criminal justice (safety) and NHS (health) costs. The State total also incurs some costs due to increased welfare expenditure resulting from Refuge’s helping women access entitlements. This is partially offset by increased tax receipts resulting from Refuge’s supporting women return to employment.

Sensitivity Analysis

Since SROI calculations are based on a number of assumptions, it is prudent to run a sensitivity analysis to ensure that these assumptions do not materially affect the return on investment ratio.

The table below illustrates how three alternative assumptions regarding proxy values, stakeholder numbers and attribution affect the outcome of the analysis relative to the baseline model (with input costs held steady across the scenarios).

- *Scenario 1* increases the number of children assumed to be impacted in child safety outcomes. Since REMIT does not specify outcomes for different children within the same family, the baseline model conservatively assumes that the outcome applies to only one. However, REMIT documents that, for service users with children, the average is between 1.7 and 1.9 children per family. *Scenario 1* recalculates the value to account for this average, resulting in an increased return of 3.83:1 against the baseline 3.54:1.
- *Scenario 2* adjusts the financial estimate of what a service user would be willing to pay to avoid the human and emotional harms of domestic violence (see Appendix A). The safety domain in the baseline model only uses 25% of this estimate, since it combines the perceived effects of harm across all the measured domains. *Scenario 2* adjusts this proportion to 30% to reflect the particular importance of safety in these estimates within the context of domestic violence. Under this scenario, the return ratio rises to 3.89:1.
- *Scenario 3* takes a different approach to estimating the number of women benefiting from safety outcomes. The baseline model uses the difference in reported prevalence of physical abuse from the point of intake to the point of exit, and scales this against the assessed severity of physical abuse at entry. *Scenario 3* uses the same scaling, but applies it instead to a larger number of individuals: those women whose caseworkers report *moderate to significant risk reduction* at the point of exit (not just those reporting an *end to all types* of abuse and controlling behaviours). Using this alternative assumption, the ratio increases to 4.36:1.

Table 5 – Sensitivity Analysis

Baseline Model				
	Refuges	Outreach	IDVAs	Total
Value of Benefits	£14,219,517	£3,376,527	£15,484,438	£33,080,483
Cost of Inputs	£7,139,359	£639,604	£1,567,260	£9,346,223
SROI Ratio	1.99	5.28	9.88	3.54
Scenario 1				
	Refuges	Outreach	IDVAs	Total
Value of Benefits	£15,071,141	£3,761,862	£16,947,598	£35,780,601
SROI Ratio	2.11	5.88	10.81	3.83
Scenario 2				
	Refuges	Outreach	IDVAs	Total

Value of Benefits	£15,153,896	£3,646,746	£17,523,602	£36,324,243
SROI Ratio	2.12	5.70	11.18	3.89
Scenario 3				
	Refuges	Outreach	IDVAs	Total
Value of Benefits	£16,646,342	£4,624,484	£19,454,640	£40,725,466
SROI Ratio	2.33	7.23	12.41	4.36

These alternative scenarios, each testing one reasonably adjusted assumption, all yield SROI ratios modestly higher than the baseline model. This indicates that the baseline model provides an appropriately conservative estimate of value, without being inflated by the assumptions chosen.

4. Conclusion

This section sets out the conclusions of the study, based on the social valuation analysis. We also present recommendations for future data collection and analysis to collect on-going evidence of the benefits of the support provided by Refuge, both to service users and wider society.

4.1 Recommendations

The study presented an opportunity to review the experience of individuals across the support programmes that Refuge offers, and to better understand the change that happens during and after the support. In order to inform future measurement of impact, we would recommend:

- Taking further advantage of the rich evidence collected and maintained within the REMIT system by regularly re-running the SROI model to include updated outcomes data (perhaps on an annual or quarterly basis). Staff may also consider adapting the SROI model to include additional or alternative specific, measurable outcomes recorded in REMIT, based on considering whether the SROI valuation, drawing on REMIT data, best reflects conditions experienced in the services.
- Refuge may wish to consider a follow-up survey to capture client outcomes occurring beyond their service exit (where REMIT data collection currently ends). This might be particularly useful for capturing their impact on children, where much additional value could be expected to accrue following service exit.
- Specific to the work of IDVAs, Refuge may wish to explore evidencing their potential to generate savings in the court system. These may be actualised through reductions in cracked cases, earlier guilty pleas, and speedier case processing brought about through their support.

4.2 Conclusions

This report has analysed the impact generated by Refuge's housing, outreach and IDVA services for three sets of stakeholders: women, their children, and the State.

The process of undertaking the theory of change workshop highlighted the breadth of challenges facing survivors of domestic violence, and provided multiple perspectives on the unique support offered through specialist Refuge services, from which a set of common outcomes was verified.

With a set of key outcomes established, attaching specific indicators of their achievement underlined the utility of REMIT, both as a case management tool, and as a rich evidence base.

The results section above highlights significant individual and wider social and economic impact as a result of women survivors and their children accessing support, which through our analysis shows a healthy overall return on Refuge's investment of 3.54:1

The greatest value accruing to women and their children came through increased safety. State savings were highest in the area of health, followed closely by safety through reduced criminal justice system costs.

In consideration of the conservative approach adopted throughout, and given the number of other probable impacts connected to Refuge services that are beyond the scope of this study (not least the future potential positive impacts on children and their life chances), we believe these claims to be modest.

Delivering economic savings is not Refuge's primary motivation; working to help women and children to live in safety free from violence and fear should not require monetary justification. Any financial demonstration of Refuge's value is ancillary to the basic principles of justice underlying their work. But, particularly in a climate of reduced social spending, it is certainly value worth considering.

¹ <http://refuge.org.uk/about-us/who-we-are-2/>

² <http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/guide-social-return-investment>